

ABSTRACT

Title: *Land Use 2025: State Land Use Policies and Plan*

Subject: State plan, policies, objectives, and strategies for land use, conservation, and development

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Abstract: This document is the third Rhode Island State Land Use Plan and supersedes all previous versions. It sets forth a statewide plan, with goals, policies, objectives, and strategies, for land use, conservation, and development.

The purpose of the plan is to guide future land use and development and to present State Guide Plan policies under which state and local land development activities will be reviewed for consistency.

The State Planning Council has approved this Plan as an element of the State Guide Plan.

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PREFACE

Purpose

Land Use 2025: State Land Use Policies and Plan is the State of Rhode Island's plan for conservation and development in the 21st century. This plan challenges Rhode Islanders to work collectively to design, build and conserve the state's communities and landscapes over the next twenty years and to ensure that they are of a caliber Rhode Island deserves.

Land Use 2025, as an official document, is the major connective State Guide Plan in Rhode Island's planning and development system. The Plan articulates the state's over-arching goals, objectives and strategies to guide and coordinate the land use plans and regulations of municipalities and state agencies and to direct good, strategic projects at both the state and municipal level.

This Plan's New Approach

Rhode Island's interconnected state and municipal planning system, in effect for more than a decade, provides the framework and process for this plan. The early 1990s were devoted to the creation and adoption of Community Comprehensive Plans in all 39 municipalities, followed by new zoning regulations and new ordinances for subdivisions and land development. In the past 18 months, 29 communities have adopted new affordable housing plans as part of this state-municipal system.

While many of Rhode Island's past plans have promoted shared concepts for statewide land conservation and community development – including the two previous state land use plans, dated 1975 and 1989 – much of the effort has revolved around process and policy consistency. With this Plan, the State Planning Council asserts a more prominent role in orchestrating statewide land use planning and promoting public investments in areas that can best accommodate growth.

The central premise of this Plan is that our current rate of land consumption is a major departure from our historic pattern of dense urban centers, *and is not sustainable in the long and short term*. It reflects the growing realization of the urgency for Rhode Island to plan, develop, and conserve more intelligently as our very small state adjusts to the pace of the dynamic Northeast urbanized corridor and its strategic position between the regional hubs of New York City and Boston. The Plan is intended to connect the planning visions and goals “to the ground” in Rhode Island communities, to upgrade the planning capacity of public officials and citizen planners, and to share land use information publicly through the best available technology.

Recognizing the complexity of the work and the naturally competing interests and jurisdictions, the Statewide Planning Program firmly believes the Plan's implementation must be through a cooperative effort. Cooperation and compromise in pursuit of shared objectives is the only way we can protect Rhode Island's very finite and precious

physical resources. In doing so, we must direct growth to areas that are equipped to handle it, based on location and infrastructure.

This Plan hopes to inspire a new generation of Rhode Islanders to become strong stewards of the state's physical resources, both natural and built.

Major Concepts

Sustaining the Urban-Rural Distinction

The distinction between Rhode Island's historic urban centers and neighborhoods and their rural natural surrounding areas is still strong. It remains the most important feature of the state's land use pattern. *Land Use 2025* identifies an *Urban Services Boundary*, based upon a detailed land capability and suitability analysis that demonstrates the capacity of this area to accommodate future growth. The Plan directs the state and communities to concentrate growth inside the Urban Services Boundary and within locally designated centers in rural areas, and to pursue significantly different land use and development approaches for urban and rural areas. Achieving a sound policy for appropriate growth in urban areas will allow us to preserve more of our rural landscape. Growth and preservation thus become a single issue.

Statewide Systems of Greenspace, Community Design and Infrastructure

The plan promotes a regional approach through stronger, interconnected, statewide systems of greenspace and natural resources, public highways, and utility infrastructure. It advocates for a network of well-designed communities made of centers of various sizes and types, neighborhoods, and special places.

Areas of Special Concern

Three categories of areas under high development pressure were identified as deserving of special scrutiny and priority assistance in land use planning and regulations. These focal areas – underutilized urban neighborhoods, highway interchanges, and the waterfront – are arguably the most valuable land use assets in Rhode Island and they are certain to be target of increasing development pressures.

Land Capability and Suitability Analysis

A major research project supporting this Plan was a computer-based land capability analysis focused on the 37 percent of the state identified as undeveloped in a 1995 Land Cover Analysis. The project studied areas for suitability for conservation and development, based on the location of key natural resources and public infrastructure. Results identified areas with future use potential, under three categories of development intensity and two categories of conservation. These data need to be continuously reviewed so that the analysis and policies in this Plan remain relevant as conditions change.

Key Recommendations

Land Use 2025 establishes 25 objectives and over 90 strategies, under goals for Sustainability, Greenspace, Community Design, Infrastructure and Implementation. Among the priority objectives:

- Sustain Rhode Island's unique character through use of the Urban Services Boundary, rural centers, and holistic approaches to planning.
- Permanent Greenspace throughout the rural, urban, and waterfront areas.
- Development concentrated in well-designed centers, neighborhoods and special places.
- A diverse and affordable housing stock.
- Public infrastructure maximized and coordinated with development.
- Reform of the property tax system in a manner that supports this plan.
- Excellent land use information and technology systems.

Plan Organization

The plan document contains five major sections:

Where are we, and where are we going? Reports on existing land use conditions and trends, analysis of future land use needs.

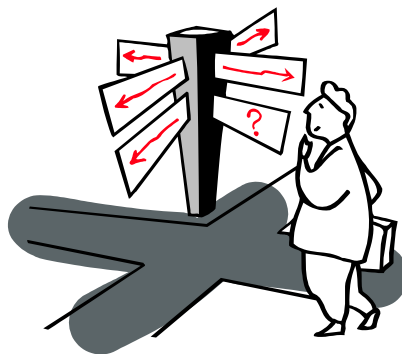
Where do we want to be in twenty years? Contains the Plan's vision statement, report on public outreach, goals, policies and the Future Land Use Map.

What issues do we need to be concerned about in getting there? Summarizes major issues by topics, matching State Guide Plan elements with significant land use issues and required municipal plan elements – land use, housing, economic development, natural and cultural resources, open space and recreation, and transportation.

How do we get there? Identifies and summarizes land use needs for all major use categories. Presents findings of mapped land capability and suitability analysis, with priorities for development and conservation.

What must be done to achieve our vision? Describes use of the State Guide Plan and Community Comprehensive Plans. Contains plan implementation section, with objectives, strategies, interagency teams, and time frames.

In addition, there are four technical appendices: Public Input on Land Use Issues, Residential Land Needs, Land Needed for Economic Activities, and Geographic Analysis for Land Available and Suitable for Development. These are followed by a list of references consulted in the preparation of *Land Use 2025*.



Apple Computer

LAND USE 2025

RHODE ISLAND'S STATE LAND USE POLICIES AND PLAN

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